

# COFOG Debate Motion Coding Manual

## 1. Purpose

This codebook provides systematic instructions for classifying debate motions into ten policy domains based on the United Nations Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG) framework. The goal is to enable causal comparisons of homogeneity patterns across distinct areas of public policy.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### Why COFOG?

The COFOG system offers several advantages for debate motion classification:

- **International Standard:** Developed by the UN Statistics Division, used globally for government expenditure analysis (UN, 1999; IMF GFSM, 2014)
- **Comprehensive Coverage:** Captures all major government functions from defense to social welfare
- **Mutually Exclusive Categories:** Designed to minimize overlap through clear hierarchical rules
- **Policy-Relevant:** Maps directly onto real-world government decision-making structures

### Theoretical Rationale for Domain Effects

Political science and communication research suggest that policy domains differ systematically in:

- **Technocratic vs. Symbolic Content:** Economic affairs (COFOG 04) often involve technical optimization, while social protection (COFOG 10) triggers value-based reasoning (Gormley, 1986)
- **Expert Authority:** Health and environmental issues may invoke scientific consensus differently than cultural/religious debates (COFOG 08) (Kahan, 2015)
- **Constituency Salience:** Defense (COFOG 02) and public safety (COFOG 03) mobilize distinct coalitions compared to education (COFOG 09) (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009)

**Hypothesis:** If policy domains shape debate dynamics, we expect significant variation in homogeneity across COFOG categories, beyond what controversy alone can explain.

### 3. The Ten COFOG Domains

#### Domain 01: General Public Services

**Definition:** Executive and legislative organs, financial/fiscal affairs, foreign economic aid, general administration, and fundamental government operations.

**Scope Includes:**

- Government structure and reform (civil service, transparency, anti-corruption)
- Public debt management and fiscal policy (not sector-specific spending)
- Foreign aid and international cooperation (non-military)
- General R&D for government innovation

**Scope Excludes:**

- Military foreign policy → 02 Defence
- Sector-specific administration (e.g., health ministry operations → 07 Health)

**Diagnostic Questions:**

- Is this about how government itself operates?
- Does it concern cross-cutting fiscal/administrative issues?

**Example Motions:**

- *THBT governments should adopt open-source software* → 01
- *THW tie foreign aid to anti-corruption benchmarks* → 01
- *THBT parliamentary systems are superior to presidential systems* → 01
- *THW introduce participatory budgeting at the municipal level* → 01

#### Domain 02: Defence

**Definition:** Military defense, peacekeeping operations, military aid, and defense-related R&D.

**Scope Includes:**

- Military spending, procurement, and structure (conscription vs. professional army)
- Peacekeeping and UN missions
- Arms control and non-proliferation
- Military technology development

**Scope Excludes:**

- Domestic law enforcement → 03 Public Order
- Cybersecurity (unless military-focused) → 03 or 04
- Intelligence operations (unless defense-specific) → 03

**Diagnostic Questions:**

- Does it involve armed forces or military institutions?
- Is the primary purpose national defense or military operations?

**Example Motions:**

- *THW abolish conscription* → 02
- *THBT NATO should withdraw from Afghanistan* → 02
- *THW ban autonomous weapons systems* → 02
- *THBT nuclear deterrence is obsolete* → 02

**Domain 03: Public Order and Safety**

**Definition:** Police services, fire protection, law courts, prisons, and border enforcement.

**Scope Includes:**

- Criminal justice system (policing, sentencing, incarceration)
- Drug policy and decriminalization
- Border control and immigration enforcement (safety dimension)
- Judicial reform and access to justice
- Counterterrorism (domestic)

**Scope Excludes:**

- Military border defense → 02
- Immigration policy (economic/social integration) → 10 Social Protection
- Cybercrime regulation (if economic focus) → 04

**Diagnostic Questions:**

- Is this about preventing/punishing crime or maintaining public order?
- Does it involve courts, police, or corrections systems?

**Example Motions:**

- *THW abolish the death penalty* → 03

- *THBT we should decriminalize all drugs* → 03
- *THW defund the police* → 03
- *THBT restorative justice should replace incarceration for non-violent crimes* → 03
- *THW grant asylum seekers immediate work permits* → Borderline; code as **03** if framed as border/security issue, **10** if framed as welfare/integration

## **Domain 04: Economic Affairs**

**Definition:** Macroeconomic policy, industry, trade, agriculture, energy, transport, communications, and economic development R&D.

### **Scope Includes:**

- Industrial policy and competition regulation
- Trade agreements and tariffs
- Infrastructure (roads, rail, airports, broadband)
- Energy policy (as economic sector, not solely environmental)
- Labor market regulation (minimum wage, union rights)
- Agricultural subsidies
- Tourism promotion

### **Scope Excludes:**

- Environmental regulation → 05 (unless primarily economic instrument)
- Social safety nets → 10
- Public health infrastructure → 07

### **Diagnostic Questions:**

- Is the goal economic growth, market efficiency, or sectoral development?
- Does it concern production, trade, or economic infrastructure?

### **Example Motions:**

- *THW break up big tech monopolies* → 04
- *THBT governments should subsidize domestic manufacturing* → 04
- *THW invest heavily in high-speed rail* → 04
- *THW implement a four-day work week* → 04
- *THW introduce a universal carbon tax* → Borderline; code as **05** if climate focus, **04** if revenue/economic efficiency focus

## **Domain 05: Environmental Protection**

**Definition:** Pollution control, biodiversity conservation, waste management, climate change mitigation/adaptation, and environmental R&D.

### **Scope Includes:**

- Climate policy (carbon pricing, emissions standards)
- Pollution regulation (air, water, soil)
- Waste and recycling programs
- Protected areas and wildlife conservation
- Renewable energy (if environmental rationale dominates)

### **Scope Excludes:**

- Energy policy (if economic rationale) → 04
- Water/sanitation services (urban utilities) → 06
- Agricultural conservation (if farm income focus) → 04

### **Diagnostic Questions:**

- Is the primary purpose environmental protection or climate action?
- Does it address pollution, conservation, or natural resource protection?

### **Example Motions:**

- *THW ban single-use plastics* → 05
- *THBT developed countries should pay climate reparations* → 05
- *THW expand protected marine areas to 30% of oceans* → 05
- *THBT geoengineering research should be accelerated* → 05

## **Domain 06: Housing and Community Amenities**

**Definition:** Housing development, urban planning, water supply, sanitation, street lighting, and community infrastructure.

### **Scope Includes:**

- Public/social housing and rent control
- Urban renewal and zoning
- Water supply and wastewater treatment (as utilities)
- Community development and neighborhood services

### **Scope Excludes:**

- Transportation infrastructure → 04
- Environmental water protection → 05
- Homelessness services (if welfare focus) → 10

**Diagnostic Questions:**

- Is this about housing markets, urban development, or local utilities?
- Does it concern community-level infrastructure?

**Example Motions:**

- *THW implement strict rent control* → 06
- *THBT governments should build public housing on a massive scale* → 06
- *THW privatize water utilities* → 06
- *THBT cities should ban single-family zoning* → 06

**Domain 07: Health**

**Definition:** Medical services, preventive care, public health campaigns, health insurance, pharmaceuticals, and health-related R&D.

**Scope Includes:**

- Healthcare delivery systems (universal healthcare, privatization)
- Public health interventions (vaccination, disease surveillance)
- Pharmaceutical policy (drug pricing, approval processes)
- Mental health services
- Pandemic preparedness

**Scope Excludes:**

- Workplace safety → 04
- Food safety regulation (if agricultural focus) → 04
- Disability benefits → 10

**Diagnostic Questions:**

- Is the primary purpose improving health outcomes or access to care?
- Does it involve medical services, public health, or health systems?

**Example Motions:**

- *THBT healthcare is a human right* → 07
- *THW mandate COVID-19 vaccination for healthcare workers* → 07
- *THW cap prescription drug prices* → 07

- *THBT we should legalize organ markets* → 07
- *THW ban direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertising* → 07

## **Domain 08: Recreation, Culture, and Religion**

**Definition:** Cultural services, media regulation, arts funding, sports, and religious affairs.

### **Scope Includes:**

- Public funding for arts and culture
- Media policy (censorship, public broadcasting)
- Sports infrastructure and mega-events
- Heritage preservation
- Religious freedom and state-religion relations

### **Scope Excludes:**

- Education (even arts education) → 09
- Tourism promotion → 04
- Cultural integration of immigrants → 10

### **Diagnostic Questions:**

- Is this about cultural production, media, or religious affairs?
- Does it concern leisure, arts, or symbolic/expressive activities?

### **Example Motions:**

- *THBT governments should fund the arts* → 08
- *THW ban religious symbols in public schools* → Borderline; code as **08** if religious freedom focus, **09** if education policy focus
- *THBT host countries lose more than they gain from the Olympics* → 08
- *THW regulate social media as publishers* → 08 (if content focus); 04 (if competition/tech focus)

## **Domain 09: Education**

**Definition:** All levels of education (pre-primary through tertiary), vocational training, education administration, and education-related R&D.

### **Scope Includes:**

- School systems (public/private, curriculum, testing)
- Higher education (tuition, admissions, research universities)
- Teacher policy and education governance
- Student financial aid
- Educational technology

**Scope Excludes:**

- Job training programs (if labor market focus) → 04
- Cultural education (if arts focus) → 08
- Childhood welfare (if social protection focus) → 10

**Diagnostic Questions:**

- Is the primary purpose formal learning or skill acquisition?
- Does it involve schools, universities, or education systems?

**Example Motions:**

- *THW abolish standardized testing* → 09
- *THBT university education should be free* → 09
- *THW ban private schools* → 09
- *THBT affirmative action in admissions is justified* → 09
- *THW mandate computer science education from primary school* → 09

**Domain 10: Social Protection**

**Definition:** Welfare programs, unemployment benefits, pensions, family/child support, disability assistance, and anti-poverty schemes.

**Scope Includes:**

- Cash transfers (UBI, child benefits, unemployment insurance)
- Pensions and old-age support
- Disability services and assistance
- Family policy (parental leave, childcare subsidies)
- Poverty alleviation programs
- Immigration (if social integration/welfare focus)

**Scope Excludes:**

- Healthcare → 07
- Housing assistance → 06

- Education grants → 09

#### Diagnostic Questions:

- Is this about income support, social safety nets, or vulnerable populations?
- Does it provide cash/services to those unable to fully participate in the market?

#### Example Motions:

- *THW establish universal basic income* → 10
- *THBT the retirement age should be lowered* → 10
- *THW provide a child allowance to all families* → 10
- *THBT governments should guarantee jobs* → Borderline; code as **10** if anti-poverty focus, **04** if macroeconomic policy focus
- *THW grant refugees full welfare benefits immediately* → 10

## 4. Coding Rules and Decision Framework

### Primary Rule: The "Main Purpose Test"

**Ask:** "What is the primary government function this motion addresses?"

- If a motion touches multiple domains, assign the **dominant** one based on:
  - Which government ministry would typically lead this policy?
  - What is the stated objective in the motion text?
  - Which domain captures the core trade-off in the debate?

### Hierarchical Decision Tree

START: Read motion carefully

↓

Does it concern government structure/operations itself?

YES → Code 01 (General Public Services)

NO → Continue

↓

Does it involve military/defense institutions?

YES → Code 02 (Defence)

NO → Continue



Does it involve police/courts/prisons/crime?

YES → Code 03 (Public Order & Safety)

NO → Continue



Is the PRIMARY goal environmental protection?

YES → Code 05 (Environmental Protection)

NO → Continue



Is the PRIMARY goal health/medical care?

YES → Code 07 (Health)

NO → Continue



Does it concern housing/urban utilities?

YES → Code 06 (Housing & Community)

NO → Continue



Does it concern arts/media/religion/sports?

YES → Code 08 (Recreation, Culture, Religion)

NO → Continue



Does it concern schools/universities/education systems?

YES → Code 09 (Education)

NO → Continue



Does it concern social safety nets/welfare/pensions?

YES → Code 10 (Social Protection)

NO → Continue



Is it about economic growth/markets/infrastructure?

YES → Code 04 (Economic Affairs)

NO → Re-read and apply Primary Rule

## 5. Handling Borderline Cases

### Common Cross-Domain Motions

Motion Type	Decision Rule	Example
<b>Climate + Economy</b>	If <b>environmental goal</b> is primary → 05; if <b>economic instrument</b> (revenue, growth) is primary → 04	<i>"Carbon tax to reduce emissions" → 05</i> <i>"Carbon tax to fund infrastructure" → 04</i>
Immigration	If <b>security/enforcement</b> focus → 03; if <b>welfare/integration</b> focus → 10	<i>"Border wall" → 03</i> <i>"Refugee benefits" → 10</i>
<b>Public Health + Economy</b>	If <b>health outcome</b> is goal → 07; if <b>economic activity</b> is goal → 04	<i>"Vaccine mandates" → 07</i> <i>"Workplace safety rules" → 04</i>
<b>Education + Culture</b>	If <b>formal learning</b> → 09; if <b>arts/expression</b> → 08	<i>"Arts curriculum" → 09</i> <i>"Arts funding" → 08</i>
<b>Tech Regulation</b>	If <b>market competition</b> → 04; if <b>content moderation</b> → 08; if <b>privacy/security</b> → 03	<i>"Break up Big Tech" → 04</i> <i>"Regulate social media content" → 08</i>

### Multi-Domain Coding (Optional)

If a motion **equally** involves two domains, you may code:

- **Primary code:** Most dominant function
- **Secondary code** (in notes): Second relevant domain

Example: "*THW ban fossil fuel subsidies*" → **Primary: 04** (economic instrument),  
**Secondary: 05** (environmental objective)

## 6. References

### Primary Source

United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). (1999). *Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG)*. UN.

### Supporting Standards

International Monetary Fund. (2014). *Government Finance Statistics Manual 2014*. IMF.

United Nations Statistical Commission. (2022). Decision 53/125(i), E/CN.3/2022/41.

### Theoretical Background

Baumgartner, F. R., & Jones, B. D. (2009). *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Gormley, W. T. (1986). Regulatory issue networks in a federal system. *Polity*, 18(4), 595-620.

Kahan, D. M. (2015). Climate-science communication and the measurement problem. *Political Psychology*, 36(S1), 1-43.